

Book Review

No-Drama Discipline:

The Whole-Brain Way to Calm the Chaos and Nurture Your Child's Developing Mind

by Daniel Siegel, M.D., and Tina Bryson, Ph.D.

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As a parenting specialist, family educator, and mother, I am frequently asked for recommendations of books that appeal to both parents and professionals. One such resource is *No-Drama Discipline: The Whole-Brain Way to Calm the Chaos and Nurture Your Child's Developing Mind* by Drs. Daniel Siegel and Tina Bryson. In this engaging text, the authors discuss discipline through a positive-parenting lens, approaching discipline in ways that are intentional, responsive, and developmentally appropriate. Siegel and Bryson suggest that child misbehavior occurs due to a child's inability to simultaneously integrate the brain's distinct regions; by employing the authors' neural and biosocial strategies, parents can foster healthier relationships with their children.

As a follow-up to their book *The Whole-Brain Child*, the authors use neurodevelopment research in *No-Drama Discipline* to challenge corrective techniques that fail to consider a child's cognitive development. Siegel and Bryson's work centers on four different regions of the brain and the need for integration both horizontally (*logic and emotion*) and vertically (*lower- and higher-order functioning*). When brain integration occurs, the child can bridge instinctual reactions (e.g., temper-tantrums) with thoughtful reflection (e.g., reasoning and restraint). The greater the level of overall integration, the more likely the child is to engage his or her whole brain in everyday actions and reactions.

Throughout the text, the authors offer corrective strategies useful to parents, grandparents, educators, and other child development professionals in helping to promote whole brain integration in the face of challenging behaviors. Because discipline, by nomenclature, means "to teach," adults should seize moments of misbehavior to teach children self-discipline. Through respectful, loving, and purposeful communication during disciplinary interactions, adults can empower children rather than fostering frustration, confusion, anger, or self-doubt. A central take-away of the book is that for corrective action to truly be effective, adults must pay careful attention to a child's emotions. Children need to learn skills that help them inhibit impulses, manage anger, and consider the impact of their actions on others; but first, adults must

employ and model these behaviors. What neuroscience tells us is that when we nurture a relationship with a child, we also nurture the connections in their brains that promote integration, reasoning, empathy, and impulse control. When a child misbehaves—whether at home, in a classroom, or in an extracurricular program—that child likely feels misunderstood and most needs emotional connection. As Siegel and Bryson assert, we cannot *correct* a child until we've *connected* with a child.

The authors explain that kids typically misbehave because they have not developed the capacity to regulate their emotional states and control reactivity. The book details whole-brain principles in relatable, applied ways that invite parents and professionals to understand the impact of their communication in shaping the development of integrative circuits in a child's brain. This in turn promotes child well-being, social and emotional intelligence, and enhanced executive functioning. Siegel and Bryson provide facts on child brain development, along with age- and stage-appropriate discipline strategies for children from toddler to tween. *No-Drama Discipline* has proven to be a useful resource for me both personally and professionally; I highly recommend this reflective read to any adult interested in optimizing opportunities to move a child's brain from a reactive to a receptive state through positive correction and communication.

Reference

Siegel, Daniel J., and Tina Payne Bryson. 2014. *No-Drama Discipline: The Whole-Brain Way to Calm the Chaos and Nurture Your Child's Developing Mind*. New York: Bantam Books.